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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs



Discussion Paper

Australia's Humanitarian Program 2026-27

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Introduction and key issues

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) publishes a Discussion Paper to invite views on the management and composition of the Humanitarian Program, including options for diversifying offshore resettlement pathways and strengthen outcomes for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

In addition to the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program composition, the Government is also inviting feedback on longer-term policy settings to ensure the Humanitarian Program remains sustainable and best responds to community needs.

As part of this consultation process, the Government is consulting with a broad range of stakeholders including:

1. state and territory governments and Commonwealth agencies;
2. peak refugee and humanitarian organisations; and
3. the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The annual consultation process is critical in informing the composition and policy settings of forward-looking Program Years. A summary of the 2025-26 consultation outcomes has been published on the Department's website.

This paper provides background information to inform your written submissions. It outlines the Humanitarian Program and issues that need to be addressed. Planning for the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program will consider Australia's capacity to facilitate the successful entry and settlement of humanitarian entrants.

Demand for places under the Humanitarian Program continues to be high, driven by record levels of forced displacement, ongoing instability and a reduction of resettlement places around the world. Australia cannot resettle all who apply for a Refugee and Humanitarian visa. There are currently close to 274,000 applicants on-hand (of which over 246,000 are offshore applicants) under the Humanitarian Program.

To ensure the Humanitarian Program can operate effectively and respond to community concerns about 'waiting times', the Government will need to consider how applicants are prioritised. Rising geopolitical tensions are increasing operational costs, cost-of-living pressures are affecting the sustainability of settlement support and high demand continues to place pressure on the Program. Adjustments to policy settings will be necessary so the Program can continue to provide resettlement pathways for those in need.

Program Size

The Government will maintain a program of 20,000 places in 2026-27 to ensure we deliver on our global resettlement commitments, and continue to benefit from the significant contributions of humanitarian entrants to Australian society.

Program statistics and reporting for the Humanitarian Program are available on the Department's [website](#).

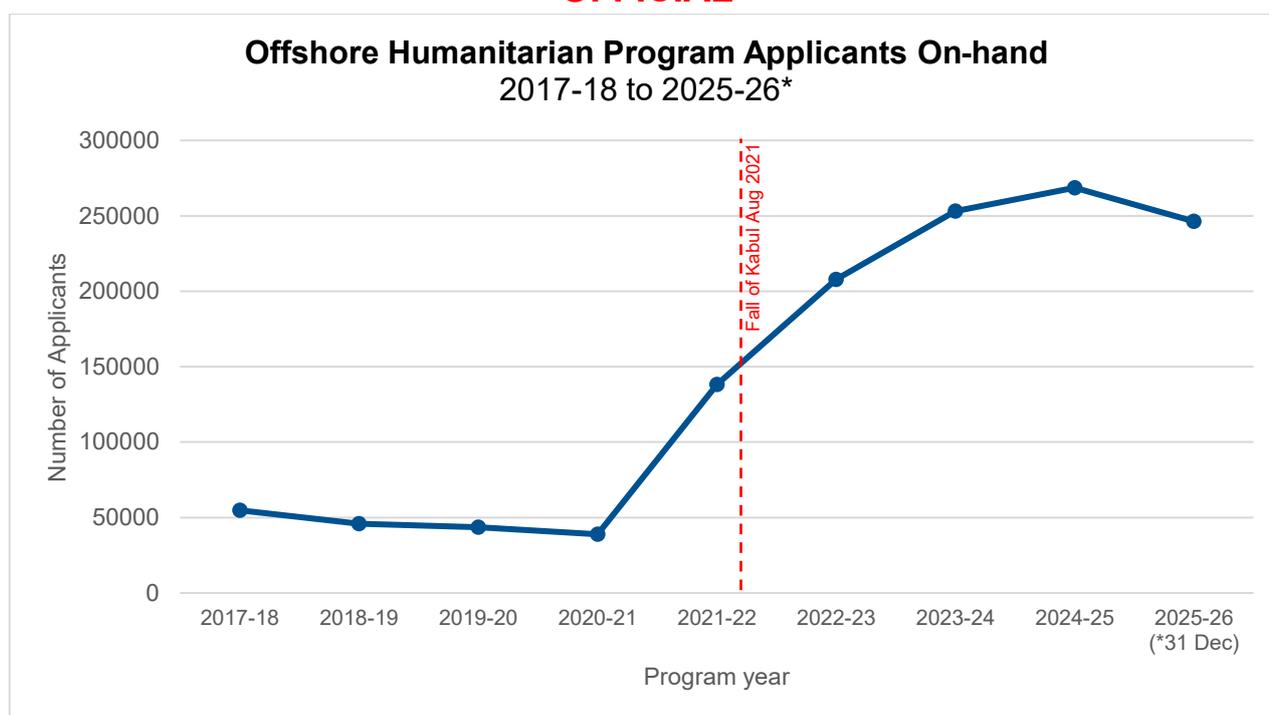


Figure. Offshore applicants on-hand under the Humanitarian Program (2017-18 to 2025-26)

When providing your submission, you are invited to consider the following questions:

1. What should the composition of Australia’s 2026-27 Humanitarian Program be and why? There are 20,000 places for both onshore and offshore components of the 2026-27 Humanitarian Program and very high demand under all streams. What should be the proportion split between the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program (including Community Support Program) streams in the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program?
2. Who should the Government prioritise within the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP)? Should existing priorities¹ change? Should there be changes to who can sponsor an applicant? Should proposers carry greater responsibility for providing settlement support to those they sponsor?
3. Global instability and rising cost of living pressures are resulting in increasing costs to deliver settlement services. How do we ensure that settlement services continue to support the most vulnerable humanitarian entrants in this context of finite resources, without compromising on long-term settlement outcomes?²
4. The Community Support Program (CSP) needs to be reformed. It is heavily oversubscribed, with around 20,000 applicants on hand and an extended wait time of around 8 years, and is no longer delivering its original intent to resettle humanitarian entrants who are job-ready and able to become self-sufficient within 12 months.
 - What should a redesigned CSP look like?
 - What attributes should new CSP applicants have and why?
 - What kind of delivery model should a new CSP have?
5. Are there other reforms you would suggest to program eligibility or prioritisation, or to the onshore protection and/or offshore program more broadly?

If you would like to make a written submission on Australia’s 2026-27 Humanitarian Program, please email humanitarian.consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au. Submissions close at **5pm on 31 March 2026**.

¹ Information on SHP Priorities can be found at the Home Affairs website: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/refugee-and-humanitarian-program/the-special-humanitarian-program>.

² Information on current settlement supports is provided at page 6 of this paper.

Background

The Humanitarian Program

The Humanitarian Program provides resettlement for refugees and others who are displaced as a result of conflict, persecution and human rights abuses. The Humanitarian Program's intake is drawn from a range of nationalities, ethnic and religious groups, reflecting global displacement arising from conflict and persecution. It operates flexibly to respond effectively to evolving humanitarian emergencies and global resettlement needs.

All Humanitarian Program applications are assessed on an individual basis, with applicants required to demonstrate their humanitarian need. Visa grants are subject to rigorous assessment, including health, character and security checks, which are conducted before individuals are granted a visa.

There are two components within the Humanitarian Program:

- the offshore component, focussing on providing permanent resettlement in Australia to refugees and people in humanitarian need outside their home country (and outside Australia); and
- the onshore component, reserved for people who arrive in Australia lawfully, seek protection, and are found to engage Australia's protection obligations.

Offshore Component

The offshore component of the Humanitarian Program has three parts:

- Refugee category;
- Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) category; and
- Community Support Program (CSP).

Refugee Category

The Refugee category assists people who are subject to persecution in their home country and for whom resettlement in Australia is the best durable solution. Australia works closely with the UNHCR, which refers the majority of the successful applicants for resettlement in Australia under this category. Under current Program settings, individuals are also eligible to apply for a Refugee category visa without UNHCR referral but a significant majority of those applicants are refused due to program capacity constraints and prioritisation of UNHCR referrals. The Refugee category has four subclasses:

- Refugee visa (subclass 200) – For people who the UNHCR has referred to Australia for resettlement.
- In-country Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 201) – For people who are still living in their country and have been unable to leave. Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program is designed primarily to assist people who have fled their home country because of persecution and severe human rights abuses, and who have no options for return or for resettlement in another country. This visa subclass is predominantly used for Afghan Locally Engaged Employees who were employed with the Australian Government in Afghanistan.
- Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203) – For exceptional cases involving immediate danger to applicants' life or liberty, whom the UNHCR has referred to Australia for emergency resettlement.
- Woman at Risk visa (subclass 204) – For women who do not have the protection of a partner or a relative and are in danger of victimisation. Most Woman at Risk visas are granted to those referred by the UNHCR or proposed by a close family member in Australia.
 - To satisfy the criteria for a Woman at Risk visa, women must not be living with a male person who is over 18 years of age, or have a male relative residing in the same locality.
 - Women who are granted a Woman at Risk visa may not be eligible to propose or sponsor a spouse or de-facto partner under the Humanitarian Program (subclass 202 or 204) or the family program (subclass 820 or 309) for five years.

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- If the application includes a child under 18, the child's other parent or guardian must agree to their migration or the law of the child's home country must permit it.

Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) Category

The SHP category (subclass 202) is for people outside their home country who are subject to substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights, and who have family or community ties to Australia.

Applications for SHP visas must be accompanied by a proposal from an eligible Australian citizen or permanent resident, an eligible New Zealand citizen, or an organisation operating in Australia. If the SHP application is successful, proposers must pay for the applicants' travel to Australia and provide initial accommodation and orientation in Australia. There are no limitations to the number of applicants a person can propose. There are sponsorship limitations on the legacy caseload of Unauthorised Maritime Arrivals who arrived in Australia on or after 13 August 2012 preventing them from sponsoring family via the SHP.

The limited number of SHP places available and the high demand for places mean that there is a lengthy wait time and not everyone is accepted. As at 31 December 2025 there are over 184,300 SHP applicants on-hand, of which, more than 80,700 people have immediate or close family in Australia). It is likely to take up to 5 years before the Department completes processing of Afghan applicants who lodged their applications in 2021. Applicants are prioritised by closeness of family connection. Further information on priorities within the SHP can be found on the Department's website: [The Special Humanitarian Program \(SHP\)](#).

Given this high demand, the Government is seeking views on how applicants within the SHP should be prioritised (see discussion question 2 on page 2).

Community Support Program (CSP)

The CSP (subclass 202) is designed to provide a model of private sponsorship for refugees that complements existing Refugee and SHP categories. It enables communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, to propose humanitarian visa applicants with employment prospects to resettle in Australia.

The CSP is intended to harness community support for refugees, including the willingness of the Australian business community to support refugees in practical ways through employment and financial assistance, and increase the chances of strong integration and settlement outcomes.

Under current program settings, primary applicants need to:

- have a job offer in Australia (or employment pathway);
- have an adequate level of English;
- be between 18-50 years old (working age);
- be able to support themselves and their family within 12 months post-arrival; and
- be experiencing substantial discrimination in their home country and satisfy all Class XB (subclass 202) criteria of the Global Special Humanitarian visa.

Australian supporters propose applicants with the assistance of an Approved Proposing Organisation (APO) who will link applicants with employment and community support, manage the visa application process and ensure the provision and management of settlement services to applicants in Australia together with the Australian Supporter.

APOs charge fees for these services which the Australian Supporter pays directly. In addition, the Department charges a Visa Application Charge (\$570 at time of application and \$7,270 before the visa is granted).

Australian Supporters are also required to fund and assist CSP entrants during their first year of settlement in Australia and provide an Assurance of Support (AoS).

The CSP is heavily oversubscribed, with applicants waiting approximately eight years for processing. These extended wait times mean job offers may no longer be available and the primary applicant may no

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longer be working age by the time the visa is granted. To ensure wait times do not increase further, the Government has implemented a program pause and has requested that APOs not accept or lodge new CSP applications (see discussion question 4 on page 2).

Onshore Component

The onshore component of the Humanitarian Program is for people who arrive lawfully and are found to engage Australia's protection obligations because they are either found to be a refugee or meet the complementary protection criteria under the *Migration Act 1958* (the Act). People found to engage Australia's protection obligations must also satisfy health, character and security requirements for the grant of a Protection (subclass 866) visa (PV).

The onshore protection of Australia's humanitarian program faces significant pressures from the high volume of unmeritorious applicants seeking to extend their stay in Australia for work. The Department continues to focus on reducing the volume of unmeritorious PV applications. For more information, please see: [Protection visas are for asylum seekers](#).

Emergency Humanitarian Crisis Response

Australia's visa and resettlement responses to emergency humanitarian crises are part of coordinated whole-of-Government efforts and support broader international responses. Each humanitarian crisis is different, and the Government response is based on the circumstances of the crisis, and the relevant needs of people impacted.

Australia's Humanitarian Program continues to face significant pressure and some recent emergency responses to humanitarian crises have been facilitated outside the Humanitarian Program, for example visa support for [Ukrainian](#), [Palestinian](#) and [Israeli](#) nationals.

Afghanistan

Since the fall of Kabul, the Australian Government allocated 26,500 dedicated places for Afghan nationals under the offshore Humanitarian Program. This includes an initial 10,000 places committed from 2021–22 to 2024–25, followed by an additional 16,500 places committed from 2022–23 to 2025–26. Afghan Locally Engaged Employees and their dependents remain the highest priority within Australia's Humanitarian Program, reflecting the Government's ongoing commitment to individuals who contributed to Australia's mission in Afghanistan, and their families. As at February 2026 there have been over 32,000 Afghan nationals granted offshore humanitarian visas since the fall of Kabul (15 August 2021).

Complementary pathways

In line with our commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees and Global Refugee Forum pledges, Australia is piloting ways to provide complementary pathways for refugees and other displaced people, including refugee labour mobility, community sponsorship and education pathways.

Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot

Designed and delivered in collaboration with Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot (the Pilot) is a practical example of how businesses in Australia can harness refugee talent to address skills shortages, while providing complementary pathways for refugees and displaced people to find safety and stability in Australia.

The Pilot will run until 30 June 2026, with an allocation of 500 primary places (plus the members of each candidate's family unit). Places under the Pilot are not counted within the Humanitarian Program planning level of 20,000 places.

- Since the Pilot started in 2021, as at 31 December 2025, **188** skilled refugees-displaced people have been granted permanent residence in Australia, along with **236** of their family members.

Through concessions to standard skilled visa eligibility requirements, the Pilot significantly reduces barriers faced by skilled refugees and displaced people when trying to access skilled visas.

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This provides real opportunities for people to resume their careers and rebuild their lives, while also providing Australian employers and communities highly sought after skills that boost our economy and enrich our society.

The Pilot is a skilled program, meaning that:

- allocated permanent places are drawn from the skilled stream of the Department's permanent Migration Program, not from Australia's Humanitarian Program; and
- sponsoring employers provide settlement support, with input and coordination from TBB
 - some Pilot candidates have been also supported by community sponsor groups.

The Government will consider outcomes of the Pilot to inform decisions regarding the future of any complementary refugee labour mobility program.

Refugee Student Settlement Pathway Pilot

Designed in partnership with Skill Path Australia, the Refugee Student Settlement Pathway (RSSP) is a new pilot that enables refugee students to migrate to Australia for tertiary study from 2026. The pilot tests a community sponsorship model that involves universities and other non-traditional actors in supporting young refugees to study safely and contribute to Australia's community and economy.

The pilot was co-designed with universities, NGOs and refugee representatives. The first intake of students have arrived in Australia and commenced their studies at Australian universities.

Eligible students must be registered with the UNHCR, aged 18–30, and meet entry requirements for a Bachelor or Masters course at a participating university. Skill Path prioritised courses aligned with Australia's projected skills shortages, such as nursing, civil engineering, and IT. Students must meet all criteria under a Global Special Humanitarian visa (subclass 202).

These places form part of the Humanitarian Program.

Settlement

The Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) supports humanitarian entrants integrate into Australian life by building the skills and knowledge they need to become self-reliant and active members of the community. These services are delivered in each state and territory by contracted service providers with extensive experience working with humanitarian entrants.

HSP clients receive a package of support tailored to their individual needs, strengths and goals. Support generally includes airport reception, short term accommodation, a package of basic household goods, assistance to find long-term accommodation in the private rental market, access to mainstream and specialist support services, and support to connect with the local community. Clients also participate in an orientation program to develop their understanding of Australian values, laws and systems and acquire the life skills needed for independence.

The Government also delivers a range of targeted programs to support [Settling in Australia](#). In addition to the Adult Migrant English Program and programs to support women and young people, this includes the Settlement Engagement Transition Support (SETS) program, which is a long-standing settlement program aimed at improving social participation, economic well-being, independence, personal well-being and community connectedness.

Assisted Passage

The Assisted Passage (AP) Program provides travel, medical and related services globally for eligible Refugee and Humanitarian Program entrants to facilitate their travel to Australia, and is critical to the successful delivery of Australia's humanitarian program.

Toll Remote Logistics Pty Ltd (Toll) has been contracted to deliver the Assisted Passage Program.

Full AP services are available for Refugee Visa Applicants and Visa Holders.

AP services for SHP and CSP visa holders are limited, noting visa proposers are responsible for supporting their applicant.

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Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO)

The Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program is delivered by IOM and is provided to Refugee and Special Humanitarian Programme visa holders (Class XB- Subclasses 200, 201, 202, 203, 204) over the age of five years prior to their departure for Australia. From time to time, other visa holders may be able to access AUSCO at the discretion of the Department or relevant Minister.

AUSCO aims to:

- give practical advice about the departure process and journey to Australia, including information on what to expect post-arrival
- present a realistic picture of life in Australia
- provide practical information about post-arrival settlement services and how to access them
- encourage language training on arrival in Australia
- equip participants with the necessary tools to deal with initial settlement concerns and the different stages of cultural, social and economic adaptation. This includes information about Australian laws and norms, including in relation to gender equality and family violence.

Humanitarian Integration and Settlement Program (HISP)

The Government is reforming the way settlement services have been delivered over the past few years. The new Humanitarian Integration and Settlement Program (HISP) will build on existing settlement services provided through the HSP. HISP will provide more flexibility for providers to deliver support to clients, based on the needs, strengths and aspirations of clients, facilitated through a mixed funding model. It will focus on areas that are critical to the successful settlement of refugee and humanitarian entrants, as outlined in the [Refugee and Humanitarian Entrant Settlement and Integration Outcomes Framework](#).

The HISP was proposed following an extensive consultation process, and a Request for Information process in late 2023 that sought feedback on delivery model options and costings for the provision of settlement services for refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Community Refugee Integration and Settlement Pilot (CRISP)

The CRISP will become a permanent part of Australia's Humanitarian Program from July 2026 and provide a dedicated settlement pathway for unlinked refugees: those without family links in Australia and referred here for resettlement by the UNHCR. The pilot commenced in 2022 and the majority of refugees settled under the pilot reported that they felt welcome in their communities and found it easy to settle in Australia. The final report from the University of Queensland's Evaluation of the pilot will be published on the Department's website.

Refugees arriving through the CRISP are helped to settle by a group of trained community volunteers, rather than the Government's settlement service providers. Community Supporter Groups provide a range of practical and in-kind settlement and integration support, including help with finding housing, work and learning English.

As at 31 December 2025, **883** refugees have been settled under the pilot.